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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 009102

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/27/2016

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [CU](#)

SUBJECT: ROCA, SANCHEZ RAP USINT'S INTERNET-ACCESS POLICY

REF: HAVANA 8769

Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: XXXXXXXXXXXX on April 18 requested a meeting with COM, without declaring the reason. At the April 24 meeting, they presented a list of 10 independent journalists banned from USINT's two Internet Centers since 2004, saying they had been unfairly blacklisted. XXXXXXXXXXXX called the bans excessive and said they amount to a professional death blow for independent journalists. They called on USINT to reconsider its punishment. The 10 are among a relatively small number of Cubans whose Internet privileges were revoked for repeatedly disturbing other users, mistreating USINT staffers or committing other offenses. COM explained that access to our Internet centers requires appropriate conduct. The two dissidents and COM also discussed the Santiago/Havana divide, the transfer of Gustavo Machin, and what keeps Fidel Castro up until three in the morning. End Summary.

¶2. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX, requested a meeting with COM. At the April 24 meeting, they criticized USINT's practice of banning visits to our Internet Centers by Cubans who repeatedly create disturbances there. The two handed COM a one-page letter containing the names of 10 independent journalists who they described as "people of proven political and civil credibility" who "work every day for democracy in Cuba" but who since 2004 have been denied access to USINT's two Internet-access facilities. In a possible swipe at fellow activist XXXXXXXXXXXX, with whom he has had a falling out, XXXXXXXXXXXX complained that USINT officials apparently blacklisted some or all of the 10 in 2004 after conferring with XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX. He said many of the independent journalists were blacklisted after failing to write about XXXXXXXXXXXX to Promote Civil Society, or writing about it in an unfavorable light. XXXXXXXXXXXX asked the COM to reconsider the bans, calling them draconian and saying they put independent journalists -- already tormented by the GOC -- in a double bind.

COM DEFENDS NEED FOR DISCIPLINE

¶3. (C) The COM accepted the note and promised to discuss its contents with other USINT staffers, who he characterized as committed to fair play. However, he defended the need for discipline at USINT's Internet centers and said USINT does not play favorites or politics with regard to access to the Lincoln or Roosevelt Centers. The COM noted that USINT is encouraging other countries with a diplomatic presence in Havana to offer Internet access. (Note: The Norwegian Embassy provides Internet access to some Cubans through one computer terminal. The Dutch are reportedly planning a

center, while the British and Czechs are said to be considering such a move. The Canadians are planning an Internet center with some eight computers. End note.)

CUBA'S EAST/WEST DIVIDE

¶4. (C) Discussion then turned to the physical and psychological divide between Havana, in the West, and Santiago in the East. XXXXXXXXXXXX, just back from a trip to his native XXXXXXXXXXXX, said the city is virtually garbage-free, unlike Havana, and that XXXXXXXXXXXX take tremendous pride in their city. He added that they are loath to criticize Fidel Castro for the GOC's shortcomings, choosing instead to vilify local leaders, including the First Secretary of Santiago's Communist Party office. XXXXXXXXXXXX then criticized Castro as "mono-thematic," saying he is unable to focus on more than one thing at a time. He added that from 8 pm to 3 am each day, Castro reviews the latest reports on State Security operations, in an effort "to continue the control, the blackmailing." On the Cuban Foreign Ministry's reported assignment of Gustavo Machin, head of the North American bureau, to an ambassadorial post in Pakistan, the COM said the move appeared to be a demotion. XXXXXXXXXXXX agreed that at worst, it is a demotion, but at best, it is an opportunity for Machin to focus on examining U.S. intelligence efforts in Pakistan.

COMMENT

¶5. (S) It's unclear what prompted XXXXXXXXXXXX to

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criticize the Internet-access policy of USINT, historically their strongest and most important ally. They could be acting out of principle, trying to win favor with other dissidents, attempting to burnish their own credentials - or all three. Either way, we found it unpalatable that at a time when very few Cubans enjoy Internet access and one activist is starving himself to make that point, key dissidents would fault USINT for acting to ensure that the Centers function fairly for all approved users. It should also be noted that the credibility of both Sanchez and Roca has long been a matter of speculation. Sanchez was at one point undeniably linked to State Security, and similar accusations have long surrounded Roca. Roca's past as a GOC insider lends credence to his astute observation that Machin may have been sent to Pakistan to develop spy networks. Regarding Roca's assertion that Fidel is "mono-thematic," we acknowledge that the dictator can be seized by a single issue. However (reftel), he has managed to juggle a number of issues this year, including energy revolution, moves against corruption, and the GOC's propaganda response to U.S. "terrorism."

PARMLY